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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 7027
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RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6596
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 002388

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SUBJECT: IRANIAN FM MOTTAKI'S HOLLOW VISIT TO INDIA

REF: NEW DELHI 2247 (PREVIEW OF MOTTAKI VISIT)

Classified By: A/DCM Uzra Zeya for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki met with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna, and Vice President Hamid Ansari during a November 16-17 visit to New Delhi that was large on formality but little on substance. A senior Indian Ministry of External Affairs official told us that "warmth" in Iran-India relations was lost after India voted against Iran at the IAEA in 2005, and he described Mottaki's meetings as "perfunctory discussions" focused mainly on economic and trade issues. He said the sides made no progress on an agreement to advance the long-delayed Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline, since serious pricing and pipeline security issues remain unresolved. India and Iran were major patrons of the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan during the Taliban years, and Mottaki and GOI interlocutors reportedly discussed a common anti-Taliban stance in Afghanistan. Mottaki invited PM Singh to visit Tehran, but GOI sources told us that Singh is in no hurry and does not want "a visit for its own sake." GOI officials stated that the issue of Iran's nuclear program was raised briefly in all three official meetings and that Mottaki was positive when Singh and other Indian interlocutors encouraged Iran to resolve the issue through direct dialogue with the international community (further details of discussions on the nuclear issue reported septel). Iranian officials were decidedly not positive, however, when a lower-level GOI official "discretely and indirectly" broached the topic of detained Amcits in Iranian custody. End Summary.

"Iranians Even More Disorganized Than We Are"

¶2. (C) V.K. Sinha, Ministry of External Affairs Joint Secretary for Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran Affairs, told us he had traveled to Tehran in advance of Mottaki's visit to prepare for the event and "make sure the Iranians don't do something to catch us off-guard." He also attended all three of Mottaki's official meetings. Describing Iranian government ineptitude in determining the members of Mottaki's accompanying delegation, Sinha rolled his eyes and exclaimed that "the Iranians are even more disorganized than we are"

and confided that GOI hosts did not know the composition of the group until Mottaki's plane landed, which created protocol headaches for the Indians. Mottaki was accompanied by, among others, the deputy ministers for oil, power, and foreign trade.

13. (C) Characterizing the substance of Mottaki's three official meetings as "perfunctory discussions since these were not technical meetings," Sinha said much of the talk centered on economic and trade issues. Sinha claimed that USD 12 billion of India's total USD 14 billion annual trade with Iran is in the oil and gas sector, and energy issues thus dominated the talks. He stated that the two sides made no progress in advancing the long-delayed Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project due to a persisting failure to reach agreement on gas pricing and because of serious doubts about Pakistan's ability to protect the pipeline. Sinha expressed doubt that either of these obstacles would be remedied any time soon and, as an example of how intractable the issue had been, noted that he wrote a paper analyzing pipeline problems in 1992. The two sides also discussed prospects for a "North-South Corridor" that would run from the Iranian port of Chabahar through Central Asia to Russia, thus providing an alternative transportation/market route and opening up new trade opportunities throughout South and Central Asia. Sinha said the two sides also discussed their shared anti-Taliban position in Afghanistan, and he lamented that USG-Iran tensions prevent the U.S. and Iran from working together in Afghanistan (along with India) to ensure that the Taliban do not return to power.

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No Rush for PM Singh Visit to Tehran

14. (C) Sinha recounted that Mottaki had extended a formal invitation for PM Singh to visit Iran next year. The Indians "do not want a visit for the sake of a visit," Sinha stated, and feel that much spadework needs to be done to ensure that any future visit is substantive and worthwhile. The next major event in India-Iran relations is a meeting in the first half of 2010 of their bilateral Joint Commission, a body that deals strictly with economic and trade issues. He stated that "the warmth" went out of Iran-India relations in 2005 when India voted along with the U.S. at the IAEA, a vote that "still rankles the Iranians" who raised it during Mottaki's visit. Sinha said that, as a rejoinder to Iranian officials, he points out that Iran consistently votes in favor of India-bashing resolutions on Kashmir in the OIC. In his dealings with Iranian officials, Sinha said he has also had to rebut an allegation that India "stabbed Iran in the back" with the IAEA vote in order to curry USG favor and was rewarded with the U.S.-India Civil Nuclear Agreement as a result. He emphasized that the current focus of India's historical relationship with Iran is India's dependence of Iranian oil and gas. Sinha explained that Iran is India's second largest supplier of crude oil and that it would be difficult for India to find an alternative supplier, adding that "we'll sup with the devil as long as we get our crude."

Negative Reply on Detained Amcits Query

15. (C) Sinha told us he "discretely and indirectly" broached with Iranian officials the topic of detained Amcits in Iranian custody, in response to our demarches on this issue and in recognition of our strategic partnership. He added that the GOI traditionally refrains from raising detention cases involving third country nationals with other governments. He said the Iranians retorted sharply and immediately that the USG is holding Iranian citizens in its custody. Sinha opined the Iranians are unlikely to release detained U.S. citizens unless as part of some larger agreement.

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